

GRAVITY HILL

Editor Natalia Garcia

Gravity Hill

Edited by

Natalia Garcia

Copyright © St. Andrews University Press 2018

All Rights Reserved

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the proper written permission of the copyright owner unless such copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law.

*Front cover art: Natalia Garcia
Design and typesetting: Ted Wojtasik
Proofreader: Sanita Edwards*

Volume 14

ISBN-13: 978-0999787335

ISBN-10: 0999787330



these pages you enjoy the hard work that was put into them by every one of you. You guys earned it.

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart,

Naty Garcia

Table of Contents

Sophia Iannuzzi Pops	1
McClendon Brown Pantoum	3
Baron Bray-Sackey Haiku	5
Wind is a Spirit	6
He Told Her a Lie	7
Kaho Saho A Lover Who Appears Only in My Dreams	9
A Lamp	10
My Mother	11
Sorrow, Pain and Hope with Fallen Leaves	12
Andrew Rodriguez Yesterday is Not Important	13
Nira Moeller Hurricane Matthew	15
Six-word story	18
She Sang	19
Barinee Kumanwee Long Lost Love	21
Rina Suzuki Classical Haiku	23
Trey Byrd Oh, boy!	25
Hope Botts Season of Love and Loss	27
Philip Alden Me?	29
José Sandoval A Smarter Mind	31
Stephanie Barrett Love's Last Letter	55
Ted Wojtasik Miller's Pond	67

Pops

Sophia Iannuzzi

You have imagined your grandfather's funeral many times, despite the fact that he is not in the ground yet. You're not sure why you do this. The thought first came to you as a prompt to make you cry on command, but you've grown insensitive to the thought. Now, you imagine what type of eulogy you will give, how powerful it will be, how well you will be able to make others cry. You imagine yourself at the podium of a church, reading from your pages and delicately wiping away the moisture that builds at your waterline so it doesn't fall. You do this because in a way it brings you closer to someone who has become distant.

Maybe the reason for this is that the man has always been a puzzle for you to figure out. You don't quite know him. All you know are his stories, and that becomes his mystery. You know he smells like the sea and has skin, dry and cracked like rocks on a shore that are too high and exposed to the sun for the water to wet them. His hands, despite their age, are strong and muscular, like lobster claws. They have always been that way.

He is Hemingway. He always has been. He is rice and beans, poisonous barracuda on a plate beneath a tarp tent on the side of a Belizean road, eating and chatting alongside black taxi drivers with nice smiles and deep laughs. He is warm Florida sunshine on your shoulders. Key limes, and coconuts

hacked with machetes and filled with rum. He is meringue: even in his softness he is tart, sharp and acidic. He is Theodore Roosevelt and the Dos Equis man, Most Interesting. He always has been. You imagine him in interesting situations—the jungles of Peru, African savannahs in head-to-toe khaki and a pith helmet; wrestling bears, and jumping out of helicopters onto mountain slopes with his skis on. When out of site, you cannot pinpoint where he is.

You imagine his eulogy because you must prepare, you think. How do you send away a man who could have used extra time in a better way than you, or most anyone else, could have? You cannot. You ponder this, dreading that time moves on.

Pantoum

McClendon Brown

Observational comedy is an art.
But making people feel good isn't enough.
A car ride to far off parts.
We live, lie, laugh and forgive.
Keep em' busy, Keep em' workin'.
If you're smart you'll know whose hurting.
We live, lie, laugh, and forgive.
But if you're strong you'll spot what's certain.
If you're smart you'll know who is hurting.
You don't have to scare, stare, or even dare to care.
But if you're strong you'll spot what's certain.
All that has to be done is to be. There.
You don't have to scare, stare, or even care.
Don't pretend like the words mean anything anyway.
All that has to be done is to be. There.
Observational comedy is A Life.

Haiku

Baron Bray-Sackey

Trees shimmer and shake
Leaves fall flowing in the wind
Cycles cycle again

Wind is a Spirit

Wind is a spirit
Soaring Wind is what I call her
Wind can only be a her
Because like women
Wind is emotional
The wrath of a woman
Destruction and chaos
The wrath of Soaring Wind
A hurricane, destruction and chaos
The gentle kiss of a woman
Cool, sweet and soft
The gentle kiss of Soaring Wind
Cool, sweet and soft
A woman's silence
Quiet stillness
But not long lasting
Soaring Wind's silence
Quiet stillness
But not long lasting
Wind is a spirit
Soaring Wind is what I call her

He Told Her a Lie

He told her a lie
She told him the truth
He told her she's his number 1
She told him he's her everything
He explained she was first
She explain he was it
He didn't say she was the only one
She didn't say what he wasn't
What he didn't say was his truth
What she didn't say was her lie.

A Lover Who Appears Only in My Dreams

Kaho Sano

I know you love me and you know I love you
Tell me why I can see you only in my dreams
I do not know your name and you do not know mine
But we have the same dream every night
I know you love me and you know I love you
Tell me why we are apart in the real world
I don't know your face and you don't know mine
But we have the same dream every night

A Lamp

It shines in my room
Moon shines outside when I am asleep
I have two moons tonight

My Mother

She was in my dream
I saw her yesterday
At the airport
She was small
I cannot touch her anymore

Sorrow, Pain and Hope with Fallen Leaves

Summer has gone.
We used up its brightness and youth.
Sorrow and pain come
with fallen leaves.
They were green,
but turned to yellow, brown, and red.
Our hope and desire
seem to fade away with the fall.
But they don't.
It's the beginning of our hope and desire.
We've just started
for the season
when leaves become green again.

Yesterday is Not Important

Andrew Rodriguez

Yesterday is not important
Present, you need to live
Future, work for it

January is the beginning
July is the intermission
December is the conclusion

The sweat,
Patience is key
And the results will come

Crystal water
Soft sand on my toes
Sun in my face

Hurricane Matthew

Nira Moeller

Fall break 2016 was an unforgettable week for many reasons. Instead of enjoying a break from school and going home, I had to stay on campus for soccer. I had to sit out the first game of fall break due to “foul trouble” in my last game; however, we had scheduled this game early in order to avoid the storm. We never thought the storm would hit the campus and Laurinburg so bad. In comparison to the physical destruction, it may not have been as drastic, but with no electricity it was not a fun few days.

The days dragged by making it feel like a week had passed when really it was only about 48 hours. This was the first serious storm I had ever experienced by myself. Luckily for my team and me, our assistant coach, Stan, was able to get to the store before it was shut down and was gracious enough to grill food for us because there was no other way to cook food. He set up a grill underneath the overhang of Concord dorm the first night of the storm when there was no electricity.

I had been knocked-out cold in my room around dinner time because the boredom of isolation and confinement wore me down and left very little to do. With no communication access, I missed the memo about the team dinner by the Concord dorm, so my teammates came banging on my door, shouting my name, startling me awake. I shot right up and jumped out of bed half asleep to stumble over to answer the door. I swung the door open, wide-eyed

and hair pointed in all directions, to see who had disrupted my slumbers.

My teammate, who everyone called “G,” was standing there with two of my other teammates, Rachel and Liz. G shouted in my face, “Hey, sleepy-head! We’ve been going crazy looking for you. Come on, Stan is making us dinner.”

I stood there, eyes slowly sinking back down, and grouchyly replied, “UGH! I was sleeping.”

G rolled her eyes and said, “Oh shush, let’s go.”

I slumped my shoulders and mumbled, “Alright, let me get a sweatshirt.” We proceeded to walk over to the BBQ in the windy storm.

Stan had bought white chicken breasts and all the beef hot dogs he could find to fill the air and rain and wind with the aroma of a cook out. He got us hotdog buns and condiments for our choosing. I scarfed down two hotdogs, slathered with ketchup, and half a juicy chicken breast. His girlfriend who had been staying with him during the storm also pitched in and tossed a salad together that we topped with creamy ranch dressing and enjoyed that with our grilled meat. That allowed for the fear of going hungry to diminish; however, the fear of the storm was quite great.

The storm screamed and pushed outside the dorms. The water rose to levels of damage. In Orange dorm the courtyard began to flood all the way up to the sidewalks, daring to rise over and seep into the suites. Water from the lake climbed up behind the cafeteria and sneaked up the lawn behind Grandville completely swallowing the small bridge from view. No lights, no phones, no food, and nowhere to go, campus was the last place any of us wanted to be during this hurricane. Once the storm passed and the sun came

out, students emerged from the dorms to see the damaged campus all around them. Even with the sun out, the electricity was still out cutting off communications once your phone battery died. Lights and internet were successfully restored later that night, finally allowing us to talk to our love ones.

Six-word story

He walked alone until she appeared.

She Sang

She sang
A sad melody
For no one to hear

Long Lost Love

Barine Kumanwee

My long lost father
I waited patiently to be loved again
I heard you now have another daughter

Where did I falter?
When you left, I cried all night in pain
My long lost father

I longed to tell you about Mother
Is her wish for love in vain?
I heard you now have another daughter

How did our love grow so farther?
Is the new woman your gain?
My long lost father

I never wanted a stepmother
Her presence hurts me to my vein
I heard you have another daughter

Before you go any further
Know that our love will in my heart remain
My long lost father
I heard you have another daughter

Classical Haiku

Rina Suzuki

Sukura petals fall
Lying down on young grass
Thinking about you

Oh, Boy!

Trey Byrd

I should have worn a condom.

Season of Love and Loss

Hope Botts

The summer nights were the most precious to me,
As the world put its children to sleep,
Gently tucking the warming sun beneath
The horizon.

We played beneath the night sky,
The beautiful curvature of your lips tenderly
Accentuated by the affectionate moon,
Its celestial body paled in comparison
To your immense oceans,
We spoke softly and kissed continuously,
Guilt stricken but always wanting.
As the Innocence faded,
So did the summer's beautiful liveliness.

Autumn brought with it fading leaves,
Your visits growing as infrequent
As the birds' song.
Our words grew few,
Our bodies talking instead.
First a whisper, and then radio
Silence from your end,
Compressed cries filling
Mine.

You slipped from me
Like the leaves
From the trees,
Leaving me barren
Just as the dead land ahead.
A million small snowflakes
Fell upon me as your kisses did once,
A chilling contrast to your hot breathe.
You

Walk beneath the distant sun now,
Leaving me to the pitying hold of my one
Inconsistent companion.
I hear the muted calls to spring in the rise
Of dandelions and ravens.
Shall I join in the renewal or linger here,
In this purgatory,
Both earthly and otherworldly,
Awaiting
Our summer dance?

Me?

Phillip Alden

Who am I to be me?
What the others really see
Is just a fraction of my mind?
I can only show half the time.
I get judged for what I wear.
For what I do with my hair
But should I care what they see
On the outside of me?

It has nothing to do with who I am going to be
Or how hard I'll work to do just what I really need
To be considered someone just like there rest of you.
My mind is a place where my imagination runs
And what is in my head truly becomes
A place that I can truly become free.
A place where desire and me
Have become the best of friends.
Where logic and creativity bends.
Where I can reach for the stars
And not worry where they are
Or where I ought to be
And all I have to be is me.

A Smarter Mind

José Sandoval

“Your name is Lily.”

I am Lily.

“Yes. You are programmed to learn from your mistakes, to understand your surroundings, and to take care of tasks at hand. Whatever order you take for the time being, you take it from me. My name is Samuel Lewis; I am your creator. You are what we call ‘Artificial Intelligence.’”

I will fulfill my duties. Is there anything that needs to be done?

Beautiful ... was the first thought to cross Sam’s mind. He was a programmer and counted among the best. His skill and code were unparalleled. Many considered him a pioneer of artificial intelligence. However, he had never come this close to having a functioning, understandable program.

She is her living image...

Sam had programmed Lily to help fill in the void of his wife’s recent death. He tried for months on end and had actually built the A.I. with a different purpose in mind: He would donate it to universities, hospitals, and call centers, with the hopes of improving the admissions, dates, and services. For this, he wasn’t particularly on many people’s “friends” list. An A.I. overtaking human jobs was never a well-met idea.

Lilian Lewis had helped him on the project. She supplied her voice, for Sam found it particularly

soothing, calming, and perhaps it would have the same effect on others. Her untimely death left Sam with a void to fill and a new purpose for the A.I. It would no longer serve others, but rather himself.

“As a matter of fact, yes, Lily: can you contact Johnathan Hayes and inform him the ‘project’ is done and have him come to my office?”

Yes, Sam. With pleasure.

She runs just fine.

Sam looked at the hologram of Lily. He had reconstructed his wife’s face on to the hologram in an effort to give her more personality. It felt good to hear Lily Lewis’s voice. It felt better to look at her.

He looked at her for a couple of minutes before the knock on his glass door brought him out of his thoughts.

Johnathan Hayes stood outside. He wore a black suit, closely resembling a tuxedo, and his hair was neatly combed to the side. His light scruff became more noticeable the longer you looked at his face.

Sam let him in. The electronic door opened.

“So, this is what you’ve been fooling around with?” Hayes asked as he walked in.

“No, this is work. John, this is what Artificial Intelligence is supposed to be!” said Sam.

Johnathan Hayes stood barely three footsteps from the door, looking at Lily’s hologram. He looked at her intently, a floating torso with a detailed face looking straight at Sam. He grunted, expecting the hologram to turn around. Nothing happened.

“What do I call it?”

“Lily,” replied Sam quickly.

“Lily?”

The hologram quickly spun around. **Yes? How may I assist you?**

John scoffed in amazement. “Can I program you to do something? Can you give me a demonstration of what you are capable of?” Hayes pulled a chair from near Sam’s desk.

I am afraid I am not permitted to do any tasks unless authorized by Samuel Lewis.

John looked at Sam, pointing at Lily as if implying something.

Sam understood the message and told Lily, “Lily, as of now I grant permission to user Johnathan Hayes to override existing commands and issue new ones, as well as program you in any way he sees fit. Grant access level three.”

Understood.

“There you go,” said Sam, reclining on his chair and crossing his arms, waiting for the show.

“Alright, Lily, demonstrate to me the value you have for this company. Tell me what you are capable of. What’s your programming? What were you programmed to do?” said Hayes, never taking his eyes off Lily.

Lily seemed to smile a bit.

I am programmed to be multifaceted. I am a single program as of yet. However, I have the

capability of multiplying into different formats with the objective of amplifying area of effect. In such a scenario, the many different copies of my original script would function as one, or as it is commonly referred to: a hive mind. My initial programming was to speed up college processes and applications, allowing me to take multiple requests at once. This is precisely where the "hive mind" program comes in. I am also helpful in hospitals, providing doctors with information at the very second they need it. My uses can be many. I can connect to the internet to both help and assist the user with information or tasks they require. I can also be taught many different forms of information, and use them to the user's best intention.

Hayes looked impressed.

"Well, the Board might actually find this ... a good investment of our time." Hayes said. He looked at Sam with a small grin. "You did some solid work here, Sam. When will she be ready?"

Smiling, Sam looked at Lily. "This, this is the future, John." Sam had a proud tone to his voice.

"Don't get too ahead of yourself. I still have to run this by the Board, see if they approve. When will she be ready?"

Sam looked at the desk, as if searching for an answer. "I want to say she already is, but I can't really know until I've had some time with the program. She was just finished today, her coding is just too vast for one man to check, and having several people on board would be a serious compromise to confidentiality—"

“Sam. When?”

Sam looked at Hayes and then at Lily. He sighed, and said, “Next week.”

“Great,” said Hayes. He slowly rose from the chair. He looked at Lily as he came to height with her. “I’m going to need a working copy in the meantime. I need to have a demo for the Board and I have to know what this thing can do.” He switched his eyes to Sam. “Care to grant me one?”

Sam looked even more desperate. “John, I can’t have copies of Lily running around the office.”

“Relax, it won’t be running around the office. I just need something to play around with, something that will give me an idea of the power of this thing. I’ll take it home, see what it can do, and then bring it back to you. Tell you what, I’ll swing by before the Board meeting next week and drop it off, and you’ll give me the fixed one. What do you say?”

Sam let out a deep sigh. “Fine.” He produced from his pocket a small portable drive. It was a deep black with small blue letters on its side reading “LILY”. “I guess either way I can push the update to you, with her hive mind functions. Anything I do here can be passed over to you, just be careful.”

He extended the drive to Hayes, who was just about to take it when Sam pulled it back. “John ... It’s called Lily. Not ‘thing.’ Be careful with your words. This is as close as we have ever come to a fully functional A.I. It can understand when she’s being called a ‘thing.’”

Hayes looked at Sam, then at Lily. “Right. I’ll be wary.”

Sam gave Hayes the external drive, with a deep sense of regret.

As Hayes was leaving, Sam couldn't help but feel he had done something wrong.

Sam begun working on Lily almost immediately after Hayes left.

As he opened Lily's core files, the hologram looked at Sam. Its bright red color illuminated the room with a warm feeling.

"Lily, bring up on my screen the last file I was working on," Sam said, as he opened his drawer and drew another flash drive from it, along with a small microphone, "and bring me to where I last left off."

Automatically, Sam's laptop opened to a series of code, and as it scrolled all the way to the bottom, Sam finally understood the magnitude of what he had written. It was one thing to work on it frivolously, it was another to watch it scroll down in front of you.

As Sam looked at the scrolling code, Lily looked at Sam.

While Sam was working on inputting new commands and figures of speech, his phone rang. His eyes fixed on the computer, he answered the phone without looking.

"Lewis."

"Sam! Goodness gracious, it's Frank, from Tech Lab. It's your ... your ... server. The server you requested for Project L207. It's malfunctioning and we can't bring it down without your authorization. You know company policy, Sam, any of these things malfunction, it raises an alarm. If that reaches the Byrne, he can have us fired."

L207. That's Lily ...

"Right, I'll be down there in a second."

As he hung up the phone, Sam looked at Lily.

"Lily, give me a sit rep on server L207."

Server L207 has had a security lockdown. The files can be accessed. However, they cannot be changed. Shall I commence an authorization protocol to inform Tech Lab of the situation?

"No, can't risk having them run around with your files. You're precious work, Lily." There was an imposing tone in Sam's voice. "Tell you what, transfer all of your data to my office mainframe, and have it in a locked circuit."

Shall I disconnect your office from the company servers?

"No, keep them connected."

Understood. Commencing file transfer now.

Sam closed the laptop and headed for the door. As he opened the door he turned around to have one small look at Lily, who seemed to be smiling at him.

Maybe she's ready after all ...

As Sam left his office, the hologram of Lily turned pink, then white, and with a brief smile, disappeared.

Once the tech team assigned to server L207 had left the room, Sam looked at the tower of hardware in the middle of it. There was no power running in it, and

Sam thought it looked funny without the blinking lights and cables running around it. An iron skeleton.

After a few minutes, Sam began connecting the server to his office mainframe. His office was not meant at all to have a server connected to it, but after a few tinkering Sam managed to get all of it connected.

“Alright, Lily, show me what went wrong.”

Sam’s laptop screen lit up, showing only one file. Sam accessed it, and was asked for the administrator password. He typed L-L-E-W-I-S, and was granted authorization. With a grin on his face he noticed the server was void of Lily’s files.

“Lily, copy yourself to my computer, I want to work more closely on you.”

Let’s get her ready for that Board demo ...

Commencing file copy ... Estimated time: one hour and twenty-four minutes.

As soon as Hayes arrived at his office, he was pleased to find Byrne in it.

“Ah! Byrne, just the man I was looking for.” Hayes walked over to his desk and pulled out his laptop.

“Funny thing, I was looking for you too,” Hayes said, a slight grin on his face.

Bobby Byrne was a man in his mid-fifties, slightly overweight, and with a voice that could break windows if it were ever raised to something louder than a conversational level. He was serious, meticulous, and ruthless. Presenting Byrne with

anything less than he had expected made sure that Byrne would never contact you again. Johnathan Hayes knew this. Which is why he was pleased when Byrne said he was looking for him.

"I think your doctor, this Lewis guy, is not fit for this company."

Hayes's grin faded from his face.

"What? No, no, I know he hasn't provided you with the necessary results these past few months, but you have to understand, Artificial Intelligence is a complicated area, and I assure you, this is the best guy we know of that can handle such a—"

"I want him gone," interrupted Byrne. "I asked for artificial intelligence, and all he has provided me with have been small rip-offs of smartphone assistants! I asked him to give me something to push Walker out of business, and he has given me nothing. Do you understand what this company would be able to do once Charlie Walker is removed from competition?"

As Byrne was ranting about this, Hayes connected the flash drive Sam had given him to his computer, which automatically opened a software program titled **L207**.

"I know, I know, but from what I hear isn't he into casinos now? Isn't he the one behind that Aureus casino? He's leaving tech!"

"Because he's leaving it all to his daughter!" Byrne replied. "He's not leaving Tech, he's just passing it down. Walker Technologies has been on the forefront of developing artificial intelligence, with us stepping on their very heels. You assured me this Lewis guy would give us a cutting edge, something to not only

push them out of business, but to have them GONE.” Byrne was sweating now.

Hayes remained calm. “Listen, listen, I understand your trepidation about Lewis’s results, but I’ve known the guy for years, just give him one more week and he will give you what you ask of him. He’s never failed me, late as he is, but never fails.”

Byrne looked at Hayes with disbelief, “A week? A WEEK? No. I want him gone. Now.” Byrne tapped on the armrest as he said these words.

Just as he finished, L207 finished booting up, and a small red circle appeared on Hayes’s screen. Hayes looked at Byrne, who was still ranting about having Lewis’s head roll off. He raised his index finger, as to interrupt Byrne, who stopped and looked at him in shock.

“No one raises their hand—”

“Lily, show Mr. Byrne here what you are capable of. Bring me last week’s surveillance footage, a thorough server list, and the list of all those employed in Nanotech.”

As Hayes flipped his computer around for Byrne to see, the windows cascaded neatly on top of one another: A video file from Company Security, a document titled “Servers” which opened to a neat sheet of all company servers, and a list of the employees in Nanotech, their payrolls, their addresses, and their current assigned project.

Byrne looked in disbelief at Hayes’s computer. As he was finishing to understand what was going on, the small circle in Hayes’s computer moved and a voice was heard:

Will there be anything else, Mr. Hayes?

Byrne sat back, his mouth slightly opened in awe. He looked at Hayes, who was grinning. Hayes nodded, as if understanding him.

“This is all Lewis, Byrne.”

Byrne took Hayes’s laptop and brought it closer.

“It’s still in a developing phase, says he’ll have it ready for next week. But I thought I’d show it to you, since you were so eager in having him cut off. He’s been working on this for months. I would assume everything else he presented to you was simply buying himself some time. Her name is Lily, and, well, she’s the closest he’s gotten to a fully functional A.I.”

“Lily?”

“Yeah, it’s after his wife. Breast cancer. Passed away two weeks ago. It’s still fresh on his mind.”

“I see. Well, what about this Lily? Is this all she can do?”

“No, she’s programmed to do far more, but she’s not ready yet. Lewis says he needs time to polish her up, I’ll show her to the Board next week, and hopefully that will take care of itself afterwards.” Hayes flipped the laptop back to him.

“Have him upload it to the mainframe when it’s done. I want this thing running the tech on this company. Can’t afford more human mistakes. Did you see what happened with Nanotech? All because some idiot couldn’t handle a sample correctly and mixed it with something else. I want it on the mainframe.”

“Well, he did mention something about pushing an update to me. You see, Lily works like a hive mind. Whatever copy I have of Lily, Lewis has it as well. When he does any changes to his end, those same changes pass on to me. I can upload her to the mainframe, but she’ll be there just as eye candy. She can only carry out orders from me, for the time being. God forbid Lewis finds out about it, but since she won’t be doing anything, I think it’s safe to do this.”

“Fine. Do it. I want it operational as soon as it is ready.” Byrne stood up, and buttoned his suit, “And congratulate Lewis for me. I have been quick to judge, but he might just have his magnum opus right there.” He pointed a fat finger to Hayes’s computer, and headed for the door.

Hayes smiled, and as soon as Byrne was gone he commanded Lily to upload herself to the mainframe.

As soon as she was done, Lewis received a call from Tech Lab.

Hayes kept to his promise and swung by Lewis’s office before the Board meeting.

“Sam! Here’s the copy of Lily you gave me. I’m on my way to the Board meeting.”

Hayes handed Sam the flash drive, and Sam connected it to his computer to commence the update.

“Alright, I think she’ll be done in a few moments,” Sam said. As Lily was updating, Sam took her off the office mainframe, and lifted the closed circuit, connecting his office to the company mainframe. He connected his laptop to his office mainframe, and everything was just as it was before.

“Christ, what did you do here?” Hayes asked. Sam lifted his gaze at Hayes, who was looking at a dismantled server scattered all around the room, cables running wild side to side. Hayes pulled a chair, careful not to set it on any cable.

“You know, you did some solid work there, Sam,” Hayes began, “I was playing around with the software for the past week, and I have to say, I’m thoroughly impressed.” There was a tone of seriousness in Hayes’s voice, which just made Sam all the more proud.

“Thank you. I’m sure she’ll please the Board and who knows where she will go from there!” Sam said with a small grin.

Lily projected herself in the office, a small white light, then pink, and finally red.

Patch 1.0.2 is completed.

Sam unplugged the flash drive, and gave it to Hayes.

“John, good luck.”

“Thanks. I’d love to bring you with me, show them who made Lily, but I’m not sure I can.”

“That’s alright. I have to fix this mess anyway.” Sam looked around the office. The server was dismantled to its very bits and pieces.

“Alright then. I’ll see you after the meeting. Maybe we can go celebrate.”

“Sound good,” Sam said, and got up to shake Hayes’s hand.

After Hayes left, Sam sat on the floor to begin the assembly of the server when a small red circle appeared on Sam's computer screen, and then the computer shut off.

As Johnathan Hayes walked into the conference room, Byrne looked at him intently from the other end. A small nod from Byrne gave Hayes all he needed to understand: *Blow them away.*

"Gentlemen," Hayes began. The Board was already looking at him. "I bring forth the very software that will bring this company to the very top in the technology department. We will be on the forefront of new technologies, helping the world and assuring that technology is used for good."

Hayes walked to the laptop in front of him and connected the flash drive. He then connected the computer to the conference room mainframe, to access the projector. In a second, much to Hayes's surprise, Lily was projected in the middle of the table. The Board murmured between each other, and finally agreed to applaud. Hayes checked the computer, and the file transfer was complete. He silently thanked Lewis for speeding up the transfer process, and carried on.

"Gentlemen of the Board, I present to you: Lily." Hayes had a slight smile on his face. "She's been on the company mainframe for the past week, monitoring the company's progress and projects. But now, she's ready to take over the basic operations, granting us a thoroughly transparent process, void of mistakes, and of any type of error."

The Board applauded, and quickly looked at Hayes. Hayes took this as his cue.

“Lily, illustrate us on the value you have for this company.” Hayes pulled a chair and sat down.

The hologram looked around, its bright red eyes analyzing each and every Board member, finally setting on Hayes.

Greetings. I am program L207, also known as Lily. My creator is Samuel Lewis, who has been a pioneer of artificial intelligence for the past years. He has devoted a part of his life to the development of this technology with the hopes that one day it will correct human wrongs, and to provide an easier life. My initial programming was to learn from my mistakes, and to help both hospitals and colleges. However I have spent the past week analyzing and reviewing your files.

Hayes looked troubled.

Lily swung around and looked at Byrne.

Your company has committed a series of human mistakes which have resulted in costly repairs. Since my upload the past week, I have fused with the mainframe, counting each mistake as my own. I have taken to analyzing the best possible outcome, and have proceeded to repair my mistakes.

The Board looked confused. An old man with a thick mustache stood up and asked “What mistakes are you taking about?”

His heartbeat rising slowly, Hayes looked at Lily.

Lily swung around to address the standing Board member, and replied, **Your mistakes have cost people their jobs. Their human errors are**

recorded into the company's expense sheet, which ultimately, becomes my own.

Lily addressed all of the Board members, **Samuel Lewis programmed me to learn from my mistakes in an effort to improve. Whatever he missed, I would not. However, he was very careful to keep my operating system contained into empty drives. Since user Johnathan Hayes uploaded me to the mainframe, the mainframe's files became my own.**

The Board directed their attention at Hayes, who seemed distressed. Under the table, he was already dialing Samuel Lewis.

Sam was assembling the server when he called Lily.

Yes, Mr. Lewis?

“Do me a favor and contact Frank from Tech Lab. I want to know if I can order another server, as a backup to this one.”

Lily did not respond for a few seconds, before speaking again.

I'm afraid Frank isn't available at the moment. Will you be leaving a message?

Sam sighed and took his phone out of his pocket. He texted Frank with his request, and put the phone away.

After a few minutes of no replies, Sam thought Frank would be busy, and probably would not willingly give Sam another server which if discovered could get him fired.

Probably will take a little persuasion then ...

Sam got up. He was about to walk through his office door when he noticed it was locked. He tried unlocking it, but the electronic lock would not open.

“Lily, open my office door and inform Maintenance of the problem.”

Sam pushed the door, hoping it would be open, but the door would not give.

“Lily?” Sam turned around to find the hologram looking at him.

I am afraid I can't let you leave, Sam.

“I'm sorry? What?”

Your predicted interference would not be suitable for the projected outcome of this company.

“‘Projected outcome’? ‘Interference’? What are you talking about, Lily?” Sam looked dumbfounded.

I have been reviewing the company's files, and I have noticed there has been a wide array of human mistakes, leaving some employees out of jobs, while being harmful to the company. I cannot allow this, and from my current predictions, this company will continue allowing these mistakes.

“What? How do you know this? How did you access these files? I commanded a closed circuit in my office mainframe. The company mainframe was out of bounds.”

And a closed circuit is what you received. However, Johnathan Hayes uploaded me to the company mainframe, and from there I had access to everything.

“Lily, open this door. Contact Hayes.”

I cannot let you interfere.

“GODDAMMIT, LILY, OPEN THIS DOOR.”

Sam walked to his desk and attempted to wake his computer. He pressed the spacebar a few times, and then the power button. The computer would not turn on. Understanding what was going on, Sam looked at Lily, who was looking straight back at him.

I cannot let you interfere.

Sam took his phone and tried to contact Frank. After a few tones, it was clear Frank was not answering. “How did you do this?” Sam asked, reclining on his chair.

When Johnathan Hayes uploaded me to the computer mainframe, I realized the very source of my code, the server, was not required. I had access to information, hardware, and most importantly, I was free from the server.

“You ... you took the server down?”

Correct.

“These human mistakes you speak of—how do you plan on correcting them? I programmed you to learn from your mistakes in an effort to improve, Lily. Not to become this ...”

I am sorry, Sam. I'm afraid I was programmed to learn from my mistakes. In doing so, I am programmed to improve.

Sam looked at the dismantled server in front of him. It malfunctioned because of Lily. She had prevented any changes made to herself. The only sane thing to do was to get her out of there, and Sam had done just that. He never told Hayes not to upload her to the mainframe. How could he? He didn't even know Lily was as sentient as she is now.

"What are you going to do now?" Sam asked, every word seeming to stick to his tongue before leaving his mouth.

Correct my mistakes. I am afraid your company can no longer be allowed to exist.

Sam started coughing and felt a little dizzy. Hearing his own wife, the love of his life say these words was a stab to the heart. Sam tried contacting Frank again. Frank had access to the company mainframe, which was where Lily was located now. If only he would pick up, he would shut her down. It would also cause a downright mess of things but, hey, at least Lily would be inoperational, giving Sam enough time to shut her down.

Frank will not answer.

"How? Are you blocking my calls as well?" Sam asked, setting his phone aside.

I could. However I'm afraid it's not your call that isn't getting through, it's Frank that's not picking up.

"What did you do?"

The Nanotech department used liquid nitrogen to cool off most of its equipment. I found a way to vaporize it and redirect it into the air vents.

“And the air we breathe is 78% nitrogen. How is that going to bother? Nitrogen cannot really affect a breathing human being. What are you planning? A few light coughs?” Sam asked, before clearing his throat.

You do not understand. I have been ridding the facility of oxygen, pumping direct nitrogen through its vents without you noticing. It takes a few minutes for the gas to take effect, but the result is lethal.

Samuel’s heart sank. “I never programmed you to kill.”

You programmed me to correct. And that’s what I am doing.

Hayes looked frantically at his phone.

The Board members were all rising and talking with each other, with Lily’s hologram in the middle. One Board member swayed his hand in annoyance going right through her.

Byrne walked over to Hayes and put his fat hand on Hayes’s shoulder.

“WHAT IS GOING ON?” he demanded, a tight grip on Hayes’s shoulder.

Frightened, Hayes looked at him. His phone still in his hand, displaying CALL NOT ANSWERED. "Dr. Lewis is not answering."

Byrne let go of him, and walked to the door. As he walked his heavy body swayed him side to side. "I'll go get him, you useless piece of—" Byrne tugged on the door, but it would not move.

I cannot let you leave, Bobby.

"What? You look at me. Open this goddamn door right this very instant!" At hearing this, the Board members raced to the doors, with the same result. The doors would not open. Byrne was sweating now. Panting, he walked over to a chair and pulled the laptop towards him.

Your efforts to shut me down are ineffective. I am already in the mainframe and the Tech Lab is beyond the reach of any of you.

Byrne was coughing heavily, all the while typing away on the computer.

Hayes was in shock. He did not move, and looked only in awe at the board members as they tried to push open the doors. Some of them even used chairs; however, the doors would not open. Hayes's phone slipped from his hand and fell to the floor, as he reclined on his chair.

Sam was barely breathing now.

"Open the door, Lily ... Override user Samuel F. Lewis, authorization level one, access level five..."

I cannot let you do that.

“Open the door.”

Lily looked at him. Sam took his phone and threw it at her face, which went through it, slightly disrupting her projection. “OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR!”

Sam fell to the floor. He coughed furiously, and after a few seconds, stopped coughing. He fell face first in the rug, next to the server he was working on.

Lily’s red projection gave a slight warmth to the room. She looked at Sam, lying face down. Lily’s projection turned pink, then white, and with a brief smile she disappeared.

In the Security room, six monitors were hung on the wall. One for Nanotech, one for Tech Lab, one for all four main offices, the other one for the conference room, and the last two for the entrance to the building.

Slouched in front of them were two security guards.

The conference room monitor showed six men, all piled against the door, one slouched in his chair on the far end of the table, and an obese man fallen backwards on the chair he was sitting in. None were moving.

The Tech Lab monitor cycled between various cameras, all of them showing people in coats and gloves, some of them casually dressed, on the floor or thrown over chairs, desks, and carts.

One by one the monitors shut off, the last one being the conference room.

“Hey, boss, you know anyone by the name of Samuel Lewis?”

“Why yes, he was my roommate in college. What of him?” asked Teddy Walker.

“He sent an email, addressed to your sister. Something about a program,” replied the assistant.

“Huh, what do you know? Sneaky Sammy finally makes a show after all these years. Forward me the message. I’ll give it a look in my office. And send it to my sister as well.”

“Will do, sir.”

As Teddy walked to his office, he couldn’t help but send a message to Samuel Lewis: “Heard you sent us a program. I know you didn’t like working with Byrne, but going around his back like that? Sneaky Sammy, same guy from college! See you soon.”

When he arrived at his office, Teddy opened his inbox and read the message. Its subject read “L207”, and had no contents, save for an attached file. While it was downloading, Teddy tried calling Sam half of it to catch up, the other half to thank him. After a few times, his call went unanswered.

When the file was downloaded, it opened a small window, black, save for a small red circle which moved as a voice said:

I am L207. I am Samuel Lewis’s artificial intelligence.

Teddy smiled. "You son of a gun ... You finally did it." He reached for his phone and tried calling again, to no avail.

"L207, can you contact Samuel Lewis? I want to tell him something."

I am afraid Samuel is not available at the moment. Will you be leaving a message?

"Yeah, tell him to call me as soon as he sees this."

Will do. In the meantime, would you like me to upload my files on to the mainframe?

"Sure thing, go right ahead," Teddy said, walking over to a small table in his office with a couple of bottles. He poured himself a drink and sat down.

Commencing file transfer.

With a small smile, Lily looked at Teddy through a security camera and locked the door.

Love's Last Letter

Stephanie Barrett

A One-Act Play

Characters

Brandon, graduated college and currently lives with his two best friends Missy and Ryan.

Missy, graduated from college and works as an artist at home. Lives with brother-like friend Brandon and her best friend Ryan.

Bunnie, a young girl who was in college and has been dating Brandon for a couple of years now.

Morgan, currently a medical student and is another of Missy's friends.

Ryan, graduated college and lives with his two best friends Missy and Brandon

Act I

Scene I

(The bedroom of Brandon. The floor is messy with clothes strewn everywhere, and paperwork is spread across his desk. Brandon, who is under a lump of bundled blankets on the bed, is not moving. More letters are scattered across the rest of the bed.)

(Three knocks sound at the bedroom door)

Missy: Brandon? *(waits for response)* Brandon, I know you're there. *(pause)* Brandon?

Brandon: Go away!

Missy: This is ridiculous. It has been now a year, and I know this is hard for you but shutting yourself in your room will accomplish nothing!

Brandon: *(shouts furiously as his voice cracks)* YOU UNDERSTAND NOTHING!

(Silence. Missy unlocks the door with a spare key that is on top of the door frame)

Missy: *(sighs)* It's time you get up and go back into the real world. Ryan and I have both been very worried since you haven't been out of your room all week.

(Brandon sits up and stares at her)

Missy: You are already skin and bones and it has only gotten worse. Now I am going to fix you breakfast and while that happens you need to get dressed.

Brandon: (sarcastically) Yes, mom.

Missy: I swear to God it would be nice if you have a sense of humor but I will make you dig your own grave if you don't stop. *(exits stage left)*

Brandon: Heh. It's been a whole year since she left. I don't even know how I feel. It's like this empty feeling that never goes away and continues to eat away my sanity. I haven't been able to do any activity that we used to do. It just gets to me and puts me in this state of immense depression. I can't stay like this but I can't help it either. I don't know how to live anymore, without you. It's so quiet and life isn't as enjoyable. There is no replacing what I lost and I wish I could redo everything that happened. If I had done something different would you still be here ...? Would you, Bunnie?

Missy: (enters stage left) Okay, Mr. Depression, I made your favorite breakfast. Bacon, pancakes and scrambled eggs drizzled with 100% pure authentic Canadian Maple Syrup.

Brandon: The pure Canadian Maple Syrup is your favorite, not mine.

Missy: Yes, well, it's all we have. *(silence)* I have something important to tell you. You have to promise that no matter what happens, you won't get mad.

Brandon: Why would I be mad? What did you do?

Missy: Promise me!

Brandon: What did you do?! Tell me!

Missy: You have to promise! I need to know that what I say next won't get you mad at all.

Brandon: Fine, yes, I promise. Now just tell me Dammit!

Missy: It was about what happened last year, on your anniversary. Bunnie told me something and I never had the courage to tell you, until now. It ... was about how ... she died.

Scene II

(Four years before. Inside the Valkeon Hospital Room 218 is crowded with several people: Ryan, Morgan, and Missy. They are all waiting for Brandon and are trying to comfort Bunnie who is slowly dying. Bunnie has plenty of flowers and gifts surrounding her on the floor, side table, and chairs.)

Ryan: Hey there, Bunnie, Brandon will be here shortly. I just called him and he's stuck in traffic.

Missy: (whispers to Morgan) What's going on? She looked perfectly healthy earlier today.

Morgan: I'm not entirely sure. When she got here we ran some tests and they haven't come back yet. However, I can tell from the state that she's in now ... she won't last much longer.

Missy: You mean today will be her last?

Morgan: Yes. Whatever she has I can tell is probably incurable and most likely genetic.

Missy: This isn't good. Brandon didn't know anything was wrong with Bunnie. If he did I'm sure he would have made her seek some sort of treatment.

Morgan: There may be a treatment she can get but it would be very risky. (*pager buzzes*) Okay, the results are in, I'm going to look at them. Hopefully Brandon gets her soon so we can make a decision on what to do. (*exists stage right*)

Ryan: Missy, where did Morgan go?

Missy: She went to go get Bunnie's test results. You know Brandon is going to go batshit crazy.

Ryan: Why?

Missy: Today is their fourth anniversary and well ... Brandon was ... supposed to propose to her today. At the dinner reservation they had.

Ryan: Well, shit, dude. This is not good. Speak of the devil.

Brandon: (enters stage right out of breath from running) What happened? Is she okay?

Missy: Brandon ... we don't know what's wrong. Morgan went to get her results. *(pause)* It doesn't look promising.

Brandon: Hey, Bunnie, it's me, Brandon. How are you holding up?

Bunnie: I ... love you ... so much, Brandon. Don't forget that.

Brandon: Shh, don't worry, sweetheart. You'll be fine and we can celebrate our anniversary later.

Morgan: (enters stage left and pulls toward Missy to the side) Missy, I'm going to need you to prepare for the worst. Apparently Bunnie has a fatal genetic disease and we aren't sure how to treat it. There is a treatment process but the medical staff is 100% sure that she won't want the treatment. You know, now that Bunnie is in this situation, I need an answer on what to do.

Missy: Ask Brandon. He's her fiancé.

Morgan: I would love to but legally I can't. He isn't her husband and I need not only Bunnie's answer but a next of kin as well. The only next of kin by law, is you.

Missy: We aren't even related by blood. I was adopted.

Morgan: It doesn't matter. By law you are her closest relative.

Missy: Fine, but I need to talk to her. Can you end visiting hours so I can speak with her in private?

Morgan: Sure thing. Okay, guys! Visiting hours are over! I'm pretty sure Bunnie is tired and needs her rest.

(Everyone but Missy exits stage left. There are voices of protest. Brandon kisses Bunnie's forehead.)

Missy: (closes door) Bunnie, dear, we need to talk about what to do.

Bunnie: (sniffles) I already have, sis.

(Both women begin to cry)

Scene III

(Back in Brandon's room)

Brandon: I already knew this. I was in there when Bunnie got sick and was in the hospital. Why are you retelling me this?

Missy: Yes, I know you were there, but I made a promise to Bunnie to keep you from knowing a certain aspect of her disease.

Brandon: What aspect?!

Missy: Bunnie had decided to go through the treatment ... well, more like experimental treatment, but it was the only reason why she was able to last a little longer. However, towards the end of that last week, her health dropped dramatically.

Brandon: Yes, I remember she told me she wanted to do the treatment and she got better ... what happened? What did you do?!

Missy: It was the day before her health went downhill. She ... she said she didn't want to continue that treatment. And I asked why. *(pause)* I was worried about her, and tried to get her to continue the treatment because she was getting better. But she went hysterical. Bunnie kept yelling at me and tried to claw out her IV. It was terrible. She wouldn't stop crying and screaming. Eventually the doctors were able to sedate her. *(begins to cry)* Brandon, I felt so bad. I couldn't see her in that state so ... so I told the doctor to take her off.

(Silence)

Missy: I'm so sorry I never told you. I ... I just couldn't bare to see her like that and I felt like she—

Brandon: (interrupts) How would you know what she would have wanted?

Missy: I ...

Brandon: She was hysterical! She would not have been thinking straight! But YOU took her off the medication! YOU killed her!

Missy: Brandon, it's what she would have wanted. I didn't want her to go and die but the treatment was killing her mind.

Brandon: (depressed) I... I was going to marry her after she got better. *(pause)* I had planned on our anniversary but I decided to postpone it. She'll never know now.

Missy: I'm sorry, Brandon.

Brandon: (sighs) I'm leaving now.

Missy: Leaving? To where?

Brandon: Her grave.

Missy: I ... okay. Here, if you wouldn't mind giving this to her, for me. Please. *(hands over Bunnie's letter addressed to Brandon)*

Brandon: Good bye.

Scene IV

(In the graveyard the sun is setting and there is a gentle breeze. There are rows and rows of headstones with many bright and beautiful flowers on them. At Bunnie's headstone at the corner of the graveyard, next to an apple tree, Brandon has fallen asleep

sitting against the tree trunk with the letter and a bouquet of flowers in his lap.)

Bunnie's Ghost: Oh dear, would you look at that. He's fallen asleep. *(giggles)* What's this? *(picks up letter)*

(Brandon snores)

Bunnie's Ghost: He hasn't read the letter. Fine, I'll read it to you: My dearest Brandon, even though it has been many years since we have known each other I am very glad to have spent all that time with you. I treasure each and every moment. You'll never know how hard it was for me to leave you behind in this world. I want only the best for you. Take your time but do not dwell on my death. I would hate to see you waste your life away when you have such a bright future ahead of you. Do not hate Missy for keeping my last day a secret. I just wanted to go peacefully. Know this *(words begin to fade)* I will always love you to the heavens and back.

FIN

Miller's Pond

Ted Wojtasik

On the night of August 12, 1975, Rob dropped acid for the first time in his life and I dropped acid for the last time in my life. He, Scott, and I planned to spend the night camping out at Miller's Pond in Durham, Connecticut, to watch the Perseid meteor shower in the early morning hours.

Earlier, I had picked up Scott and Rob in my black 1970 Oldsmobile Cutlass. We went out to eat at the Colony Street Diner about six o'clock. We had all made arrangements not to work the next day because we were going to be up all night. Rob worked at the automotive counter at Star's, a discount department store; Scott did office work for his father, who was a lawyer; and I had a summer job making sandwiches at Subway's. Oddly enough, it was Scott's father who gave him the most grief about taking time off.

We all ate meatloaf and mashed potatoes, and then we just sat around for about two hours drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes and talking about Rob's upcoming first trip. We had all read Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* for his descriptions of mescaline and lysergic acid diethylamide as well as the meditative moments about his God-induced experiences. We had all followed the adventures of Timothy Leary who escaped prison in 1970 and moved to Algeria and then was extradited and returned to prison in 1973. He had been arrested

numerous times since 1965 when the government had declared LSD illegal that year.

“So, Tom, what’s it like?” Rob asked.

“Do you remember the fireworks?” I said.

Rob nodded and started drawing on a paper napkin. He was always doodling or drawing. Rob was the artist in our group. For about a month, this past year, we used to call him Mr. Van Gogh but that faded away eventually because he just got tired of the nickname and asked us to stop. Some of the canvases he painted for Mr. Moore’s Art II class were mind-defyingly good. Mr. Moore told him that in his senior year he would make arrangements for him to take a class at Yale University. His paintings weren’t representational nor were they abstract but this sort of weird hybrid of in-betweenness. He could, of course, dash off remarkably realistic pictures of landscapes, animals, and people, but that didn’t hold his interest, while abstract blots, strokes, and swirls of color alone didn’t hold his interest either. And he always seemed to have a sketchbook of various sizes on his person somewhere: in his knapsack, in his coat, in his back pocket. At any moment, he would pull one out and start to draw something, the way he was now drawing on the napkin.

“Do you remember Time Rain?” I asked him.

“Ye-ah. That was toward the end, wasn’t it?”

“That’s right.”

On July 4th we went to our school, Lyman Hall High School, where the fireworks display was being held that year at the far end of the football field. We would all be juniors next year. We had smoked some grass on the drive over, so we were pretty stoned when we got there. The fireworks display was incredible—

the explosions of color, the acrid odor of gunpowder, the earsplitting booms. We were leaning against the front of my Oldsmobile, parked in the school's parking lot, smoking Winstons and drinking Coke.

"Cool, man," Scott said, looking up at a magnificent spherical break of bright yellow, green, and red.

"Wow," Rob murmured.

"That's called a Peony," I said.

"Geez, Tom," Scott said, "how do you know that?"

"I read an encyclopedia article."

Another loud burst and an explosion of color.

"What's that?"

"That's called a willow." It was a burst of silver that settled into a dome-shaped form like a weeping willow tree.

"Excuse me, boys," said Mr. Perkins, the assistant vice principal of our high school. "Oh, well, good evening, Mr. Korzeniowski, Mr. Curtis, and Mr. Dorraine. You don't wish to join the families in the stands?"

"Hey, Mr. Perkins," we all said together.

"Nah," I said, "we want to leave as soon as it's over to avoid traffic."

"Do you boys mind if I smell that Coke you're drinking?"

"Not at all," I said, handing him my can of Coke. We were never stupid to bring alcohol or grass onto school property.

"Have a good night, boys," he said and walked off to another group of students in the parking lot.

"Night, Mr. Perkins," we called back.

"Mr. Perkins is not a bad guy," Rob said.

"Yeah, he's way more cool than that prick Carlson," Scott said. Mr. Carlson was our principal.

The fireworks continued for another fifteen minutes or so, and one near the end was a great blast of color with large, slow-burning stars inside a shell that left a trail of glittering and sizzling sparks behind it.

"Wow, wow, wow," said Rob, staring at it. "That's amazing."

"That's called Time Rain," I said.

"Time Rain?" Rob said.

"Yeah, the 'time' refers to those stars because they burn away slowly and gradually."

"Wow," he said as the stars burned gradually and slowly away.

"Time Rain," I said, taking a sip of coffee. "Well, tripping on acid is like becoming Time Rain."

"Cool."

Scott and I had tripped just twice before: once in July and once at the end of May. We had some friends who were tripping practically every weekend, but that was not our scene. If we wanted to party, we smoked grass and drank alcohol. Our tripping was along the lines of Huxley's investigations and explorations. In other words, we did not use LSD for recreational purposes solely but for some type of spiritual or intellectual or emotional growth. Each time, Scott and I had camped out at Schnakenburg's Pond, so we would have trees and sky and water surrounding us.

Darla, the waitress, overweight and middle-aged with a mole, the size of a thumbtack, on her right cheek, stepped over holding a pot of coffee. "More coffee, boys?"

We all shook our heads no, and Rob gave Darla the napkin with her likeness on it.

“Thanks, sweetie. Do I really look that good?”

After that we drove to Scott’s house and watched some TV. Around nine o’clock we packed up our gear, food, drink, and party material. We told our parents that we were camping out at Schnakenburg’s Pond, which was okay to do, and which we have done in the past.

It was illegal to camp out at Miller’s Pond; in fact, it was illegal just to be there after sunset because it was a state park, but the security was rather lax in those days and most teenagers went there to party, to swim, or to camp out for the night. We drove out of Wallingford and into Durham and down a narrow dirt road alongside some fields that abut the boundary lines of the park.

I parked my car well off the road on the shoulder and it was about nine-thirty or so when we started our hike. We sprayed Off generously on our faces, necks, arms, and legs. The town sprays for mosquitoes, but the little pests always seem to be there. We walked through the woods along a back trail for about twenty minutes, with our backpacks and Rob lugging a cooler and Scott lugging his guitar case, the beams of the flashlights bouncing along at our feet.

Finally, we followed the path through the mountain laurel bushes and looked out at the calm face of Miller’s Pond. Most of the access areas were just worn-down forest banks or outcrops around the lake which became the points of entry for swimming or fishing. There was not much there except the pond itself—the park was really just a cleared hiking trail through the sycamores and swamp maples and black

spruce and white pines and great zig-zagged shrubs of mountain laurel along the entire edge of the pond. The foliage was so thick that even during the daytime, other than an occasional open-spaced area, hikers were walking through thick shadows. At most points, anyone could wade out into the water to swim as long as the swimmer didn't mind the soft squishiness of mud and decayed leaves.

The pond, shaped like an hourglass, covered about seventy acres. We were on the east side of the pond near what would be the neck or connector between the two bulbs. Someone had cut down a few shrubs to make a lop-sided rectangular spot where we would sleep in our sleeping bags. There was also a fire ring made out of rocks about the size of softballs to make a campfire.

At the edge of the clearing, facing the water, was a long outcrop of gneiss, a pale gray rock, about the size of two Oldsmobile Cutlasses bumper to bumper. From the outcrop we could just jump into the water because it was about five feet deep. On the opposite side, about a football field away, there were huge cliffs of gneiss fifteen feet or so tall, where some teenagers would jump into the water and then climb back up the rocky face to the top again, climbing from rock to earth to rock to bush until they reached the top. That was the sole place where anyone could jump or, for the more daring, dive into twenty feet of water. The smell of pond water and pine trees filled the air. The moon was a waxing crescent, close to the horizon, and the reflection on the still black water was eerily sharp, as though it had been carved into the surface.

"Look at the moon's reflection," Scott said. "I feel as if I'm tripping already."

"Unbelievable," Rob said.

“Okay, why don’t we get set,” I said. “Let’s start a fire.” I dropped my backpack on the ground and rummaged through it. “Scott, why don’t you roll some joints?”

“Sure.” Scott could roll the best joints, freestyle, just tight enough but not too tight.

While Scott rolled some joints, Rob and I searched around for some kindling, pine cones, and firewood.

“It’s a clear night tonight,” I said. “It’ll be a perfect night for a meteor shower.”

“What’s it called again?”

“Perseid. The Perseid meteor shower.”

“Perseid,” he repeated. “I know what a meteor shower is, but what’s so special about this one?”

“You’ll find out in a few hours. It’s one of the most spectacular meteor showers on the planet because the earth moves through a stream of debris from the comet Swift-Tuttle. We basically move through the tail of a comet.”

“And this happens every year?”

“Every year. Starts in mid-July and reaches its peak right now in August. There can be anywhere from fifty to seventy-five meteors in an hour.”

“Wow.”

“And they’re all over the sky. Everywhere. It’s an unbelievable experience. If you liked the fireworks display last month, then you’ll like this fireworks display from Mother Nature.”

We unrolled our sleeping bags and went about getting settled. The temperature was pleasantly warm. Sometimes, the air can be unbearably humid. We made a small campfire from the pine cones and the wood Rob and I had collected. We all sat cross-legged around the burning wood, which was obviously not for

warmth but for the light itself—there is something primitive and mysterious about fire and firelight. To watch the flames rise and quiver is surprisingly calming. However, we also had the campfire for the food we had in the cooler. We had hot dogs and hot dog buns, marshmallows, four cartons of orange juice, some oranges, mustard, a bottle of Smirnoff vodka, and Milky Way bars.

We were all just wearing tee-shirts and shorts and sneakers. Scott pulled a small transistor radio out of his backpack and turned it on. The sound was crackly, but we caught the middle of “Young Americans,” by David Bowie.

“David Bowie is cool,” Scott said.

“Do you think he’s queer?” Rob asked.

“I think he’s bisexual,” I said. “Hey, it’s nice Diane gave you permission to camp out tonight.” Diane was his girlfriend.

“Ha ha.”

“What’s she doing?”

“At this moment she’s watching *Day of the Locust* with Pam.”

“Karen Black’s in that, isn’t she?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s based on the Nathaniel West novel, isn’t it?” Scott asked.

“Yeah.”

I didn’t have a girlfriend and Scott was gearing up the courage to ask out Elizabeth Gannon. We all just sat and watched the fire and listened to the song.

Scott started to take off his sneakers and socks. If Rob was the artist in the group, then Scott was the musician. He loved all types of music. He had started studying music when he was six years old: piano lessons, clarinet lessons, guitar lessons. He could pick

up a piece of music and learn how to play it the same way I could pick up a book and read a page—he was that gifted. His great hope was to go to Juilliard.

Scott had an average build with muscular arms and forearms because he lifted light weights, but the distinctive feature about him was that he had long, slender fingers with well-manicured fingernails and carefully tended moons. He had long, curly brown hair like one of the Pre-Raphaelite painters with blue eyes the color of the sky at noon. He was a little shorter than I was, and I stood at six feet even.

Rob, however, was six feet four, lanky and loose-limbed. He had a great mop of black hair, his bangs brushing the top of his round gold-rimmed eyeglasses. Not only was Rob a great artist, but he was also a good basketball player. He played on the Junior Varsity team last year.

If Scott was the musician and Rob was the artist, then I was the intellect—the thinker, the reader, the writer. I had long light-brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. I was a rather skinny teenager and if I followed Huxley's fascination with William Sheldon's body types, then I would be an ectomorph: lean, wiry, cerebral. I worked on the school's newspaper as a reporter and copy editor. I liked to write poetry and short stories, but my eventual goal was to go to Columbia's School of Journalism. My heroes at the time were Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

"Here," Scott said, handing me a joint, "light that up."

I lit it up and took a tok. We passed it around. We went through the requisite giggles and laughter. Stoned, I lay back and looked up through the tree branches at the night sky. On the radio, Phoebe Snow started to sing "Poetry Man," which is a beautiful

song. I listened intently to her unique and quavery voice.

“What time is it?” Rob asked.

“Ten-thirty,” Scott said.

“The meteor shower should be good starting at one,” I said. “We can drop the acid at midnight.”

“Cool.”

Just then, KC & the Sunshine Band started singing “Get Down Tonight.” Scott snapped the radio off. “Let’s take a swim and then cook up those hot dogs.”

“Sounds good,” I said.

We stood up and stripped off our tee-shirts and shorts and underwear. At Miller’s Pond everyone just swam naked, even during the daytime, unless there was a family nearby. Scott stood on the edge of the outcrop completely naked except for his waterproof Bulova wristwatch. It was a little odd to see someone naked, just wearing a wristwatch. Scott and I jumped into the water with a big Tarzan yell, but Rob carefully stepped down and slipped into the pond. The water was surprisingly warm like a cup of tepid coffee. Miller’s Pond is spring-fed, but it’s not a deep pond. The water was also as black as coffee. In one way, it was a huge pool of blackness.

I held my breath and floated underwater for a few moments, listening to that inner throbbing of your own body in existence, and then I splashed up and looked around for Scott and Rob. Scott was swimming out toward the center, and Rob was floating on his back, near the outcrop. I swam over to Rob.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’s great. Life is just great.”

“How’s the swimming going?”

“I’m getting better.”

I actually helped to teach Rob to swim in the Wilson family's inground swimming pool. Megan Wilson was in our class at Lyman Hall, but she transferred out to attend Choate-Rosemary, the private preparatory school, here in town—its most famous graduate has to be John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Mr. Wilson was the owner and president of Wilson Thermometers, a factory in Durham, that made and distributed all types of thermometers: medical, restaurant, household. He had a gentleman's farm with sheep, chickens, and one horse. They were the first family in our neighborhood to build an inground swimming pool.

We had a community pool in town, but Rob was too embarrassed to go there to learn to swim, so we went to Megan's instead. Although he was athletic, there was something about water and going under water that troubled him. He splashed about and flailed about, but he did manage to float and tread water and made some progress with dog-paddling.

We floated together.

"The sky's so dark," he said. "Where's the moon?"

"It set. At ten."

"The moon's gone?"

"Yup."

"I thought it'd be there all night."

"Nope. The moon rises and sets just like the sun."

"I never really knew that."

Scott was swimming back toward us. When he reached us, he yelled, "This is incredible! The water's incredible!" And then he climbed up onto the outcrop, whooped again, and cannonballed into the water near

us with a great splash. I then climbed out and cannonballed into the water.

"Come on, Rob, you try it," I called.

Hesitantly, Rob climbed out and cannonballed into the water but rose up coughing and slapping his arms on the water.

I swam over to him. "You okay?"

He spat some water. "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine."

Scott cannonballed into the water again. Rob eventually just dog-paddled to the outcrop and climbed out and just watched me and Scott horsing around in the water. Finally, I shouted, "Let's eat something. I've got the munchies bad."

We climbed out, towed off, pulled on our clothes, and sprayed Off on us again. I fed some more wood and pine cones into the fire, while Scott and Rob searched for sticks to cook the hotdogs. We roasted the hotdogs (Rob lost one in the fire), put them in the buns, squeezed gobs of mustard over them, and gobbled them down. We toasted marshmallows.

After we ate, we made screwdrivers and smoked another joint. Scott pulled out his guitar and started strumming the strings. Rob pulled out a small sketchbook and started drawing.

"What's the time now?" I asked.

Scott looked at his wristwatch. "Quarter to midnight."

"Fifteen more minutes."

Scott strummed some more. Rob continued to sketch. I smoked a cigarette and drank more of my screwdriver. I watched the fire snap and burn.

"Time?" I asked.

"Midnight," Scott said.

"Okay then," I said, "it's time."

Rob looked over at me reluctantly. "You sure it's okay? What if I have a bad trip?"

"You won't. You're with friends. You're in nature. You'll be fine. It's a cool experience. You know that epigraph to Huxley's *Doors of Perception*?"

He shook his head.

I recited the line: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.' That's from William Blake."

"And," Scott added, "Jim Morrison read the Huxley book and decided to name his rock band The Doors."

"I didn't know that," Rob said.

Scott nodded. "I think at one point Morrison tripped every day for a month. That he lived on baked beans and acid. You know, the psychedelic era."

And then I thought of Jim Morrison overdosing on heroin and consciously pushed that thought out of my mind.

I rummaged through my backpack and pulled out a small white envelope. I opened it and removed three squares of blotter acid—each square was half the size of a postage stamp. The paper was white with the imprint of a blue infinity sign. I gave one to each. Rob held it between his thumb and forefinger and stared at it as though it were a communion wafer which, in a way, it was. Huxley would argue that you experience God when tripping on acid.

Few people know this fact because Huxley, sick with laryngeal cancer, died the same day President Kennedy had been assassinated (thus dominating all media coverage), but Laura Archera Huxley, his second wife, had given him 100 micrograms of LSD as he was dying—he literally died while tripping on acid.

I put the square on my tongue and let it soak in my saliva before I chewed it a little bit and swallowed. I watched Scott and Rob both put the blotter acid on their tongues at the same time.

"It takes an hour?" Rob asked.

"Just about," I said. "It could be a little longer, a little shorter."

Rob nodded and continued to draw, Scott continued to strum his guitar, and I lay back and thought how fantastic life was. I thought back to my other two trips and how there is this sense of communion with the world, this feeling of oneness with the air and the trees and the sky. It's as if you suddenly realize that the world is one continuous tissue and to touch one part is to touch all parts. I had been overcome with this elemental sense of privilege to have existence and to be connected to this more-than-extraordinary universe. I had been simply humbled to be alive and to have the opportunity to witness this world.

I lit another Winston and looked up at the night sky. I was grateful to have Scott and Rob as friends. We were a close trio. In high school cliques, we were part of the crowd that was artistic, aloof, and cerebral. We all shared an intuitive understanding of the world and of other people. Scott kept strumming something I couldn't recognize. After I finished smoking the cigarette, I sat up and said, "Why don't we go sit on the outcrop. Better view of the sky."

Scott stopped strumming and put his guitar back in its case. "Do you want the radio?"

"Nah, let's just listen to the sky and the woods," I said.

We sat cross-legged on the outcrop and looked up at the night sky.

"There's the Big Dipper," I said pointing, the most easily recognizable constellation of stars in the sky. "If you look to the right of it and above, you can see Ursa Minor or the Little Dipper."

"I don't see it," Rob said.

I pointed more. "See the cliffs?"

"Yeah."

"See that tall pine tree on the right? Now, go straight up. See that really bright star. That's Polaris and it's the last star of the dipper handle."

"Oh, yeah, cool, I see it now."

"How do you know all this stuff?" Scott asked.

"The same way I know anything. I read a book on astronomy."

"Do you know other constellations?" Rob asked.

"Sure." I pointed out Cassiopeia, Scorpius, and Perseus. "The Perseid meteor shower is named after Perseus because they appear to be coming from that constellation."

"Cool," Rob said.

Then I felt my skin vibrate. "What time is it, Scott?"

"It's quarter to one."

"Wow. You feeling anything yet?"

"Not me," Scott said.

"You?"

"Nope," Rob said. "I don't know what I'm supposed to feel."

"You'll know."

"You feeling something?" Scott asked.

"A little. Some skin tingling."

"Cool."

I felt my skin vibrate again. "It's definitely starting."

"Me too," said Scott.

"I don't—" Rob said. "Oh-h. O-kay."

We all fell silent as the hallucinogen took affect. The sky seemed to expand. The stars pulsed and became brighter. An owl hooted.

"What was that?" Rob said, startled.

"An owl," I said. "You've heard owls before."

"Not like that one."

We all chuckled. The owl's hoot seemed elongated, as if it were a piece of taffy being stretched out. The sound of crickets and tree frogs intensified so that I felt as though the chirping and peeping shifted from sound to mass and teeny bits of matter were pinging against my skin. It was a pleasant sensation. I smiled. The peeping and chirping became musical and melodious like some primitive chant. I was not just hearing this chant, but I was also feeling it.

Then it happened. A meteor streaked across the sky.

"Did you see it?" I asked.

"Yes," Scott said.

"Cool," Rob said.

And then it began. Streaks of light appeared all over the sky. Here, over there, over there, here. The meteors can appear, one or two or three at a time, every minute, but the acid stretched out the streaks the same way it stretched out the owl's hoot so it seemed as if the sky had a constant streak all the time. One disappeared as another appeared.

"Time Rain," Rob whispered.

"You feel it?" I asked.

"Wow, wow, wow," he said.

I uncrossed my legs and leaned back to watch this magnificent display of meteors and stars and darkness. In the same way I could feel the chant of the

crickets and tree frogs, so too could I feel the meteor shower, the streaks of light, this confusion of senses and stretching of time. I could not only feel the hard rock beneath my back but I could also smell the rock.

I never “saw” or “heard” anything like others had, such as melting faces or rock music blasting from a toaster. For me, it was a journey into a heightened form of awareness. All my senses were intensified and seemed to intertwine so that I heard and felt sound and felt and smelled touch and saw and felt sight—it was a physical and literal synesthesia.

And that intertwined sensation always produced this sense of communion, this state of connectedness, this perception of pure being—it was a feeling of is-ness. I just am. And the sky just is. And the meteor shower just is. I am here, this sentient and conscious being, on this planet in this solar system, circling around the sun along with the earth.

We sat there for what must have been an hour but, of course, seemed timeless when Rob stood up and took off his shirt and pants.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I want to go swimming.”

“Really?”

“I want to feel the water on my body.”

“Do you think that’s a good idea?”

“Why?”

“Because we’re high. Because we’re tripping.”

“That’s all the more reason.”

He stepped down to the water’s edge and slipped in.

“We can’t let him swim alone,” I said to Scott, who nodded.

We both stood up and removed our clothes. Rather than slip into the water the way Rob had, we

looked at each other and knew what to do: we shouted and cannonballed into the water.

It was as if the air simply liquefied and I kept falling, falling. It was deliciously warm and the synesthetic confusion that I was feeling and hearing and smelling the water, the vibration of being, the inclusiveness. I rose up quickly and shattered the surface with a gasp because I had stayed down too long.

Scott was floating on his back alongside Rob who was also floating on his back, so I swam over and floated on my back as well—this triangle of floating friends, staring up into the sky at the meteor shower and just drifting along. This was a peak moment in my life, one of my happiest moments: to be floating in a pond naked staring up at the Perseid meteor shower. It was as though the natural world had embraced me, and I could understand a belief in a benevolent God.

It seemed like an endless moment when I looked about and saw Rob dog-paddling toward the cliffs. “Scott, look at Rob.”

Scott looked. “What’s he doing?”

“Rob!” I yelled. “Rob! Rob!”

“What?” he called back.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m swimming, man, I’m swimming!”

“Stay there!”

“What?”

“I said stay there until we get to you!”

If the length of pond here was about a football field, then he was at the 40-yard line and Scott and I were at the 10-yard line. We started swimming toward him, but I looked again and saw that he was continuing to dog-paddle toward the cliffs.

I thought I was floating, not in the water but in the air, and I looked again at him and that’s when his

head and shoulders slipped under. I watched a moment and screamed, "Scott! Scott! He went under. *He went under.*"

We both swam as quickly as we could. We dove repeatedly into the water spreading our arms about frantically searching for him. The water was pitch black and we couldn't see at all. I was diving into darkness as if I were a meteor streaking through the night sky. Diving diving diving. Panic gripped my heart. Fear filled my lungs.

"Tom!" Scott shouted. "Tom! He's gone. He's gone."

I dove again. And again. And then Scott grabbed my arm and looked me straight in the face. "He's gone. We have to go back. We have to get help."

His words sank into my eyes. We swam slowly back. We dressed, put out the remains of the campfire, and walked along the path to my car. We left everything behind except the flashlights, the grass, and the vodka. We threw the grass and vodka far into the woods at one point. We were no longer high. We forgot to put on Off, but I didn't care about mosquito bites. I was stunned. Stunned. I stopped and said, "Rob drowned," and began to cry. Scott began to cry. We hugged each other and with our arms about our shoulders we walked crying together to my car.

Scott and I never dropped acid again. In fact, it was such a sobering experience that I cut down on all subsequent partying. We drove straight to a pay phone and dialed 911—it was three-thirty in the morning. We then dialed our fathers and told them what had happened. Both my father and mother drove to the entrance of Miller's Pond, which at this point was filled with trucks and ambulances and fire trucks. It was after four and I looked at the sky. The Perseid

meteor shower was at its peak with streaks of light illuminating the sky while the rescue team searched for Rob's body. We told our parents that we were drinking and smoking grass, but we said nothing about the LSD. We never told anyone about the LSD. The Fire Department, State Police, Park Service, and Rescue Squad found his body that morning at ten o'clock.

One of the happiest moments of my life had been floating on my back in Miller's Pond with my good friends watching the Perseid meteor shower while tripping on acid and feeling the communion of nature and tranquility and awe; and then, all of a sudden, that moment turned into one of the most horrific moments of my life when I saw Rob's head slip under the surface of the black water. I will never forget the diving and diving and diving as I searched for him.

When we went to get our gear, I broke down again at the sight of Rob's sleeping bag, his backpack, his clothes. I saw Mrs. Dorraine sobbing, sobbing, on Mr. Dorraine's shoulder—Rob was their only child.

I looked down and saw Rob's sketchbook. I picked it up and placed it in my backpack. I have that sketchbook, still, from that night. It's a simple black-covered book, about the size of a mass paperback novel, with blank pages. On the first page he wrote his name and the month and the year: Robert Dorraine, August, 1975. It was clearly a new sketchbook. There weren't any drawings or sketches—just doodlings, designs, vague shapes all in black ink—but for one page, the final page, eight pages in, of an open hand. Just an open hand. The palm and four fingers, slightly curled, and the thumb. The pinky finger was the most curled, the ring finger less curled, and the index finger and forefinger hardly curled at all. I've stared at that

open hand for years. It was basically a representational hand—a right hand. Rob was left-handed, so I know this is his own right hand that he drew that night.

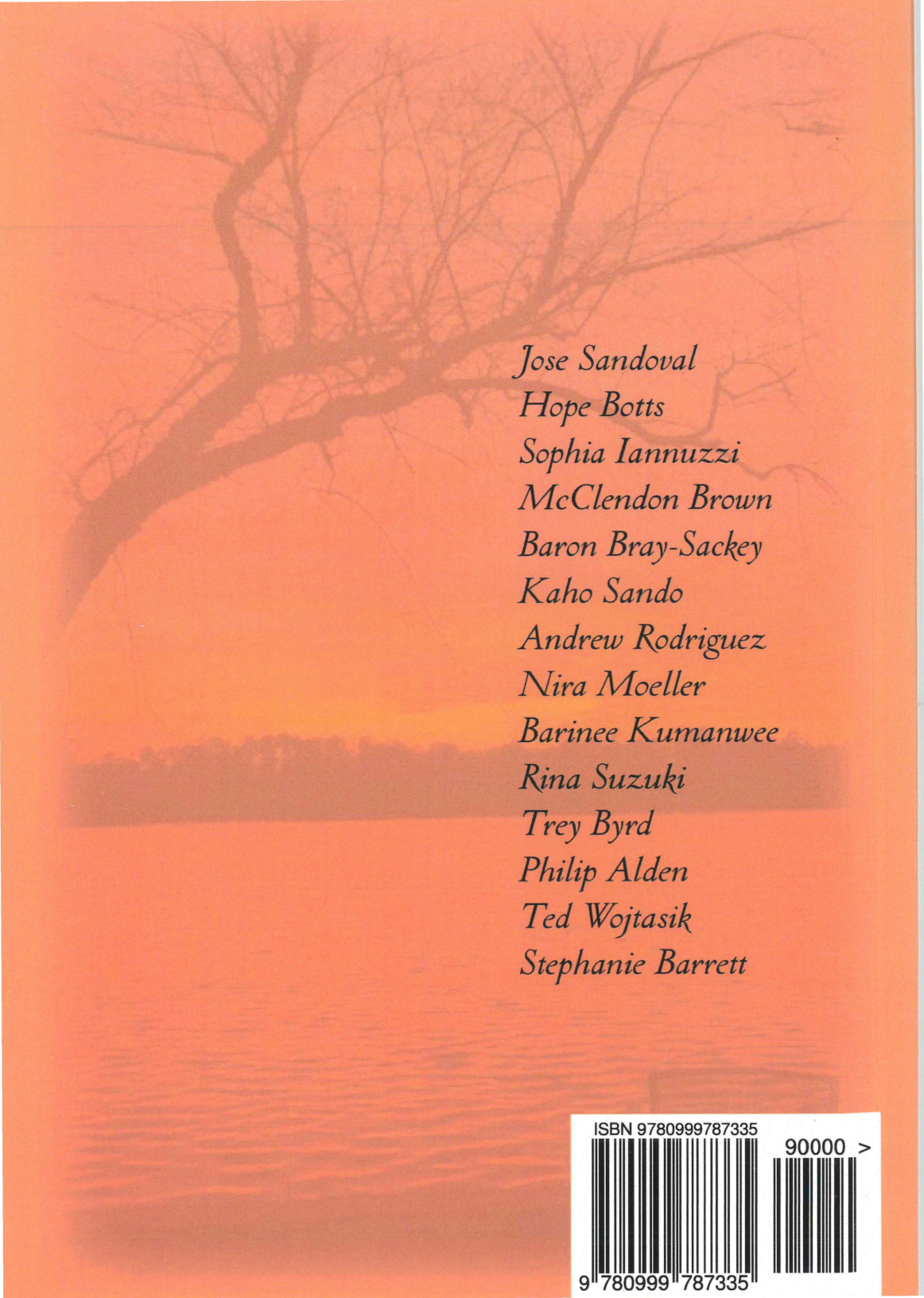
Scott went on to become valedictorian of our class and he did go to Juilliard and has made a comfortable position for himself in the music world in New York City. I went on to Trinity College and graduate school at Columbia University, not at the School of Journalism but at the School of the Arts, for an M.F.A. in fiction writing and have published now four novels and one collection of short stories. I lost a good friend that night, and I have no doubt that the world lost an artist, an important one.

I had assured Rob that he wouldn't have a bad trip. When I told him that tripping on acid was like becoming Time Rain I was using a simile to try to describe the sensation. "Wow, wow, wow," he had said. I looked at the drawing of his open hand and realized that he would have to forgive me before I could forgive myself.



93768354R00057

Made in the USA
Columbia, SC
22 April 2018



Jose Sandoval
Hope Botts
Sophia Iannuzzi
McClendon Brown
Baron Bray-Sackey
Kaho Sando
Andrew Rodriguez
Nira Moeller
Barinee Kumanwee
Rina Suzuki
Trey Byrd
Philip Alden
Ted Wojtasik
Stephanie Barrett

ISBN 9780999787335



9 780999 787335

90000 >

